Potential Responses to the COVID-19 Outbreak in Support of Migrant Workers

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This note describes the key challenges facing the health, livelihoods, and mobility of internal and international migrants and their families due to the COVID-19 outbreak. The note presents the policy options available to governments to address these challenges and describes the assistance that the World Bank can offer in areas related to social protection and jobs to support these efforts.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The living and working conditions of internal and international migrants make them vulnerable to contracting COVID-19. Measures put in place to control disease transmission both within and across countries have resulted in significant disruption in transportation networks and in labor markets that have hit migrant workers hard. The resulting decline in remittances will transmit these negative impacts to the families of migrants.
- Travel restrictions may lead to labor shortages in critical sectors like agriculture that are dominated by migrant workers.
- While the specific type of support that should be targeted to migrants depends on location, legal status, and type of migration, most migrants will need access to safety nets in the form of cash or in-kind assistance to support them as they comply with transmission control measures and cope with the impacts of the crisis. Policies to support employment retention and promotion will be particularly important as a complement to these safety nets for internal migrants and migrants returning from abroad. Policies to offset the expected declines in remittances will be important for all migrants and their families.
- Programs created to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak should be migrant-sensitive to take into account the unique challenges facing migrants.

CONTEXT

Across the globe, international migrants and their families are highly exposed to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts. Based on UN estimates of migration stocks and World Bank remittances data, more than 270 million people currently live outside their country of birth and send more than $620 billion in remittances to their home countries. Ninety percent of COVID-19 cases have occurred in just 20 countries (excluding China). These 20 countries host 50 percent of the world’s migrants who send home 55 percent of the world’s remittances (Figure 1).

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Migrant health is a key concern during the COVID-19 outbreak. Although migrants tend to be younger than the local population, they tend to live and work in crowded conditions that do not permit social distancing, putting them at increased risk of contracting the disease (Kluge et al. 2020). This has occurred in Singapore where an estimated 40 percent of the country COVID-19 cases in mid-April were low-skilled foreign workers and in Saudi Arabia where more than half of the cases were foreigners. Migrants also face challenges accessing healthcare even in normal circumstances due to lack of health insurance, cost, administrative hurdles, lack of access to facilities, and language barriers. In the United States, for example, 20 percent of immigrants lacked health insurance in 2017 versus 7 percent of locals (Batalova, Blizzard, and Bolter 2020). Additionally, many migrants are frontline workers who keep people healthy, safe, and fed. These workers may be at less risk of job loss but are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19. The Migration Policy Institute estimates that 17 percent of workers employed in frontline occupations in the United States are migrants (MPI 2020). Finally, migrants returning home, particularly because of job loss or travel restrictions, can be vectors for the disease, as has happened in the case of Myanmar migrants returning home from Thailand.

Restrictions on travel and the related fall in commercial flights, also put migrants at risk. Major migration destinations from the United States (a destination for migrants from Central America) to Australia (a destination for migrants from the Pacific Islands) to Russia (a destination for migrants from Central Asia) have closed their borders to international travelers (Figure 2). In some cases such as Nepal, significant migrant origins have closed their borders to returning migrants. Some countries including China have imposed restrictions on travel within countries. At the same time, international and domestic travel options have dwindled. This has left migrants in a variety of challenging situations. Migrants who work in or were planning to work in another location cannot access their job (as is occurring with migrants from Tajikistan to Russia), cannot travel home even if they have lost their job (as is occurring with migrants from Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar in Thailand), or are stuck in transit (as has occurred with internal migrants in India).

Even amid significant unemployment, travel restrictions, transmission control measures, and fear of contracting COVID-19 are creating labor shortages in some sectors. Travel restrictions mean that migrant workers from Eastern Europe find it difficult to access the agriculture sector in Britain, France, Germany, and Spain. Farmers are warning that without these workers they will struggle to harvest spring and summer crops. The potential for labor shortages in the agricultural sector is also apparent in Poland, where Ukrainian migrants have returned home and in the United States, which relies on seasonal workers primarily from Mexico.

Migrants are likely to experience severe economic impacts from the COVID-19 outbreak. Migrants account for a large share of the workforce in the sectors that are most likely to be affected by the severe job loss resulting from the crisis. The UN estimates that nearly 30 percent of the workforce in highly affected sectors in OECD countries is foreign-born (UN 2020). The negative effects of job loss can be particularly significant for migrant workers because they frequently work in informal jobs and so lack safety nets in case of job loss or illness. Few migrants from developing countries have access to social protection coverage (Avato, Koettl, and Sabates-Wheeler 2010).
The negative impacts of migrants losing their jobs have an additional, global effect on migrants’ families and their home countries. The drop in labor income from job loss as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak will result in significant declines in the remittances that families throughout the world rely on to make ends meet and to make investments in human capital and businesses. Remittances represent a significant source of income in many developing countries. For example, the
ratio of remittances to GDP is greater than 4 percent in fourteen countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, putting them at risk when migrants lose their jobs (World Bank 2020b). Remittances flows to Lesotho where remittances represent 15.7 percent of GDP and to Zimbabwe where they represent 8 percent of GDP would be particularly affected by a downturn in South Africa. In Nigeria, where remittances amount to 6 percent of GDP, the Central Bank recorded a drop of inflows by half in February. Declines in remittances are likely to be significant. BBVA Mexico projects a 17 percent drop in remittances to Mexico primarily from the United States in 2020. Remittances in Bangladesh in March dropped 13 percent year-over-year.

**Internal migrants will be affected in similar ways.** Internal migration is a fact of life for households across the globe. The IOM estimates that there are 763 million internal migrants globally. Dense living and working conditions make internal migrants susceptible to contracting COVID-19. Restrictions on internal travel and the fall in domestic commercial transportation options resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak have put many migrants in limbo, unable to return home but unable to make a living in their destination. This situation has arisen in India, which announced a lockdown that restricted business activity and movement. Many internal migrants lost jobs and were left without income, food, and accommodation; others sought to return home but have been stranded in transit due to travel restrictions. This situation has also arisen in China and Sri Lanka. The economic impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak for internal migrants and their families are likely to be significant. In Africa, for example, large numbers of rural youth are employed in urban areas: 35 percent of Kenyan households, 30 percent of Senegalese households, and 42 percent of households from Uganda have at least one internal migrant. These young people will no longer be able to earn a living to support their family due to lockdowns.

**The longer term impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on migration are uncertain.** Several factors could play a role. Persistently depressed economic conditions could mean lower demand for migrant workers and less support for permissive migration policies. Prolonged travel restrictions may induce additional technological progress in sectors like agriculture where shortages do arise, also lowering demand for migrant workers (Clemens, Lewis, and Postel 2018). On the other hand, technological progress is unlikely to be able to completely automate away the need for migrant workers, and a sustained recovery is likely to rely on this labor to fill shortages that arise as economies recover. Negative attitudes have been already been expressed towards internal migrants in some settings, which could have implications for movements within countries in the future.

**CHALLENGES**

**Different types of migrants face different challenges.** The COVID-19 outbreak will create some challenges that are common to all people who have moved across internal and international borders. However, there are some unique challenges that specific types of migrants – temporary, informal, permanent, internal, and returning migrants – face. Table 1 at the end of this section summarizes the challenges faced by these different types of migrants.

The COVID-19 outbreak poses specific challenges for temporary migrants and their employers. These workers migrate temporarily (even seasonally) with work visas. Immigration status is almost always linked to maintaining a job often with a single employer. These workers tend to be employed in low-skilled occupations, and remit large shares of their income. Social protection for these workers, if received at all, is typically limited to some work injury compensation or health benefits, and almost never includes unemployment assistance. Job loss as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak means loss of income for consumption, to remit home, and to repay the often large loans taken out to finance migration. Job loss may even result in loss of housing, as accommodations are
often provided by employers. Shared accommodations and work environments that are not conducive to social distancing and home-based work make these workers more susceptible to COVID-19. Accessing medical care may be difficult because they often work and live in remote areas and may avoid testing and treatment due to low incomes. Beyond income and health effects, job loss could result in loss of legal status where this status is tied to employment. In some cases, such as for workers from Pacific Island Countries working in Australia and New Zealand, border closures create significant uncertainty for temporary migrant workers whose visas will expire, even in cases in which they are able to continue working. Lack of resources to pay for travel home and lack of travel options could put these migrants at significant legal risk. Even as demand for migrant workers declines in some sectors as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, shortages are arising in other sectors in which temporary and seasonal migrants typically work but cannot access due to travel restrictions. This is occurring in the agricultural sector in Australia, France, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

These challenges are exacerbated for migrant workers who move abroad without legal documents. Informal migrant workers may have crossed borders to seek work in neighboring countries without legal authorization or may have entered legally but are not or are no longer authorized to work. Estimates suggest that up to 20 percent of all migrants could be irregular (UNDESA 2018). Regional migration hubs like India, Malaysia, Russia, South Africa, Thailand, Russia host more than 25 million migrants and are the origin of more than 5 percent of global remittances (UNDESA 2019; World Bank 2020). Long, porous borders with lower income neighbors mean that many of these migrants move without the necessary legal documents. Overstay is more common in high-income countries like the United States. Most informal migrants are employed in jobs without social protection benefits, contracts, and workplace protections, or are ineligible for these benefits because they lack migration documents. This makes it easy for firms to fire them during economic downturns and more vulnerable once they have lost their jobs.

Legal long-term international migrants are likely better positioned to weather the COVID-19 outbreak, but face challenges including ones that are relevant for households back home. These are migrant workers who have a path to permanent residency in the destination countries. Most of these migrants are in destinations in the global north such as Australia, Canada, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and United States. Even if they do not intend to return home, many send remittances. These migrants typically have secure employment (for many, secure employment offers a pathway to residency), and may have access to social insurance and social assistance measures. The impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on this group is likely to be similar to that on local workers with both experience significant negative economic effects. However, there are several potential additional issues that this group could face. Job loss associated with the COVID-19 outbreak could jeopardize a migrant’s legal status (particularly for those with employment-linked legal status). This group may not be eligible for some social protection measures, as is the case with the cash transfers currently being deployed in the United States. Finally, temporary or permanent income loss could lead to a reduction in remittances sent home.

Internal migrants also face significant challenges from the COVID-19 outbreak. Internal migrants in developing countries tend to be employed in low-paying, hazardous, and informal jobs with limited access to health services, social protection coverage, or worker protections. This makes it easy for firms to fire them during economic downturns and more vulnerable once they have lost their jobs. Job loss may lead to loss of accommodations where employers provide housing. Workers facing loss of wage income often seek out employment in the agricultural sector. However, lack of resources combined with travel restrictions can make a return home from wage employment in urban areas impossible. Internal migrants may also lack access to benefits if these are based on location or jurisdiction and are not portable.
Table 1: The challenges faced by different types of migrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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| Temporary international migrants | • Most are in Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Malaysia through bilateral migration agreements with many countries in South and South-East Asia.  
• Other examples include Korea’s Employment Permit System and the guest and seasonal worker programs in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand | • Job loss leads to economic hardship, loss of remittances for migrant’s family, inability to repay debt incurred to finance migration, loss of employer-provided housing, and legal status  
• Limited social protection  
• High risk of disease exposure and transmission due to living and working conditions  
• Lack of resources and travel restrictions may strand these workers |
| Informal international migrants | • Origin and destination countries with long, porous borders (India, Malaysia, Russia, South Africa, Thailand, United States)  
• High-income countries where migrants may overstay visas (Europe, United States) | • Same as temporary international migrants but these migrants also typically lack contracts and any social protection benefits |
| Long-term international migrants | • High-income countries (Australia, Canada, European Union, United Kingdom, United States) | • Job loss could jeopardize legal status  
• May not be eligible for certain types of social protection  
• Job loss may lead to a reduction in remittances |
| Internal migrants             | • Many developing countries                                               | • Same as temporary international migrants without the implications for legal status in most cases  
• May face challenges accessing benefits if they are based on location or jurisdiction |
| Return migrants               | • Many developing countries                                               | • Health risks for migrants moving in large groups and for populations at home  
• When back home, lack of employment opportunities, limited access to social safety nets, large debts accumulated to finance migration costs, families that are no longer receiving remittances |

Migrants who have returned home as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak will continue to face challenges. The combination of the decline in economic activity, travel restrictions, and lack of social protection in many migrant hubs have already induced many migrants to seek to return home. As of early April 2020, more than 40,000 migrants were estimated to have returned to Myanmar from Thailand with similar numbers returning to Cambodia and Lao PDR. More than 115,000 Afghan workers returned from Iran to Afghanistan during March 2020.¹ These movements create health risks for migrants moving in large groups and for populations back at home because of lack of screening at formal and informal border crossing and insufficient health care.² When back home, returnees will continue to face challenges including lack of employment opportunities, limited access to social safety nets, large debts accumulated to finance migration costs that would have been paid with higher incomes earned at the destination, families that are no longer receiving remittances, and even discrimination by community members fearful that migrants may transmit COVID-19.
Several mechanisms can be used to provide support to migrants in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. These mechanisms include 1) social safety nets to protect migrants from the negative consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak including income loss and health impacts; 2) employment retention policies to keep all workers, including migrant workers, employed; 3) employment promotion policies to help displaced migrant workers get back to work; and 4) remittance policies to address the fall in remittances that is likely to result from the COVID-19 outbreak. These programs can be targeted directly to migrants or, if they are targeted to a broader population, be made sensitive to migrants’ needs. This will help ensure that everyone has access to the benefits and services needed to help stop the spread of the pandemic and limit its negative consequences. Table 2 at the end of this section summarizes these potential responses, while Annex 1 presents interventions implemented in various countries.

1) Social safety nets. Social assistance or social safety nets provide direct support either in the form of cash or in-kind goods and services to smooth consumption, compensate for higher prices, and help prevent falls into poverty. Governments could consider three different strategies to address the current challenges.

First, eligibility for existing safety net programs can be expanded to address the challenges faced by migrants. For instance, Australia has expanded the categories of migrants who can access the Special Benefit financial assistance program for people in severe financial hardship, but only for certain categories of migrant workers (and not Pacific Island workers under the Seasonal Worker Program or the Pacific Labor Scheme). Portugal has granted immigrants and asylum seekers whose applications are being processed temporary residency rights, which gives them access to public services such as national health services and welfare benefits. France extended residence permits for 3 months to ensure that access to healthcare and social security is not interrupted.

Second, programs newly created to address the economic shock of COVID-19 can be targeted regardless of migration status. For instance, migrant workers holding residence permits in Italy can apply for the €600 income subsidy under the COVID-19 Cure Italy stimulus. The same applies to migrants in Ireland, who have access to the €350 weekly Pandemic Unemployment Payment. International seasonal migrant workers under the Recognized Seasonal Employer program are eligible for New Zealand’s COVID-19 sick leave scheme as well as for government funding under the COVID-19 Economic Response Package in case they cannot work during the lockdown because their employer’s business is not operating or if the employer cannot afford to pay them due to reduced business activity. Australia also announced that it would allow unemployed individuals on temporary work visas to withdraw up to $5,996 (A$10,000) from their superannuation (retirement) savings annually for the next two years. When the scheme was first announced in response to COVID-19, only individuals eligible for unemployment benefits had been allowed to access the scheme, excluding individuals on temporary work visas. In Myanmar, an emergency COVID-19 cash transfer targeted to vulnerable groups, including internal and returning international migrants, will be financed by a consortium of international donors. Foreign workers in Uzbekistan are eligible for the training that will be provided as part of an anti-crisis fund. Brazil, Thailand, and Vietnam have announced benefits for informal and self-employed workers that would apply to workers regardless of their location (that is, internal migrants can access the benefits). China’s response measures to COVID-19 including temporary assistance have largely treated internal migrants and non-migrants equally. India is considering a similar approach.
Third, new programs can be created to help migrants confront the specific challenges they face. These include providing access to testing and treatment, providing food and accommodations, providing transportation assistance, and providing cash grants.

- **Provide access to free or low-cost testing and treatment for COVID-19.** Migrants face an increased risk of contracting COVID-19 and have significant challenges accessing healthcare. In response, governments can provide access to free or low-cost testing and treatment for COVID-19 regardless of migration status. Countries welcoming returning migrants home can provide the same. Qatar is providing medical services including medical checkups for coronavirus and quarantine services free of cost, and has announced that full salaries will be provided by employers to migrant workers in quarantine or treatment, and has set aside funds to support companies. Additionally, a hotline to report grievances via text messages was launched for migrant workers in their language. Temporary migrants in Kazakhstan have access to free medical clinics for COVID-19. Malaysia has done this by making undocumented migrants eligible for tests and treatment for COVID-19 without payment or threat of deportation. In the United Kingdom, the National Health Service is free and accessible for coronavirus regardless of migration status. Korea has made access to free COVID-testing and treatment available to informal foreign workers, along with partial income support during treatment. Hospitals are not mandated to ask about a migrant’s status or report their details to immigration and labor authorities.

- **Provide food and accommodations for displaced migrant workers.** Job loss particularly among internal migrants working day-to-day as casual laborers can result in immediate food needs. Loss of a job can also mean loss of accommodations when housing is provided by an employer. Travel restrictions that strand migrants may also create immediate needs for food and shelter. In these cases, government can provide food assistance and housing subsidies or housing alternatives. The Government of Panama announced that will be offered to around 2,500 migrants at three immigration stations at Panama’s borders with Colombia and Costa Rica. Singapore temporarily provided $35 a day in housing support to assist with employers’ costs due to Malaysia-imposed restrictions preventing frequent commuter workers from returning to Malaysia. This assistance has now been stopped. Qatar has said that workers unable to return home if their jobs are terminated will be able to remain “with proper lodging and food.”

- **Arrange transportation or provide transportation subsidies to help migrants return home.** Health concerns and job loss mean that many migrants want to return home. Travel restrictions, cost, and lack of commercial transportation options complicate efforts to return, leaving some migrants stranded at their destination or in some cases in transit. Government assistance can help these migrants return home by financing transportation subsidies in cases in which commercial transportation options are available and arranging transportation in cases in which commercial options are not available. These may require coordination between origin and host governments. Indonesia’s National Agency for Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI) has facilitated the return of documented and undocumented migrants from Malaysia. In China, local government have fully or partially provided costs for “point-to-point” chartered buses, trains, and flights to transport internal migrant workers from their hometowns to workplaces.

- **Provide cash grants to migrant workers to compensate them for income loss and provide debt relief.** The economic impacts of COVID-19 on the labor market mean that migrant workers may be left with less income or without an income source at all.
Governments can help protect workers in this situation by providing cash transfers to workers to (partially) compensate them for income loss and to provide debt relief. The State of California in the United States announced the introduction of a one-time cash benefit of $500 in support of undocumented Californians impacted by COVID-19 who are ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits and disaster relief due to their immigration status. China has provided a one-off cash transfer of $423 to internal migrant workers in Wuhan unable to return to employment in other locations because of travel restrictions. The Philippines has announced $200 cash assistance to international migrants workers whose work has been affected by COVID-19 regardless of whether they are abroad or in the Philippines. Thailand has made $456 available to returning Thai migrants who are members of the Overseas Workers Fund. This assistance will not be available to undocumented migrants.

2) Employment retention. Employers can be incentivized to maintain their existing workforce either through deductions in social insurance contributions or through employment subsidies. These policies can cover the entire workforce, but be implemented with the intention to prevent the displacement of migrant workers, particularly internal migrant workers. Singapore recently announced cancellations of the foreign workers levies due by employers in April. China has provided social insurance exemptions and wage subsidies to stabilize employment including for internal migrant workers. In Korea, foreign workers under the Employment Permit System are eligible for fiscal measures to support SMEs enacted in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, including employment retention subsidies and paid leave subsidies. Employment retention policies can also involve changes to migration regulations, particularly in sectors facing shortages such as health care and agriculture. Korea has extended the employment contracts of temporary foreign workers in its Employment Permit System (EPS) by 50 days for workers whose employment terms are ending soon. The United Kingdom automatically extended the visas of foreign doctors for one year. Extensions to work permits were also introduced in Australia, Bahrain, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Poland, Spain and the UK.

3) Employment promotion. Employment promotion policies help jobseekers find jobs and employers find workers. These policies also include rules regarding migration programs that can be adjusted to facilitate employment. Some of these policies are immediately relevant, particularly due to shortages created by travel restrictions, while others will be most relevant at later stages of the response to COVID-19 when social distancing and transmission control policies are relaxed.

- **Deploy employment services to promote employment among migrant workers.** Employment services like job matching and job search programs can help migrant workers who are displaced by the crisis find jobs, particularly to fill labor market gaps created by travel restrictions. The programs could also provide transportation or transportation subsidies for migrant workers to facilitate access to jobs in the agricultural sector where shortages may develop. This may require incorporating health checks to protect against transmission of COVID-19. Such programs could also provide safe transport to migrant workers to jobs in the agricultural sector. Australia is seeking to match temporary migrant workers participating in the Pacific Labor Scheme with new employers where existing employment has ceased as a result of the crisis. China has developed a job application and held online job fairs, interviews, and recruitments to help match workers, including internal migrants unable to travel to their workplaces, to jobs. Responding to the inability to bring new temporary migrant workers into the country, Korea is seeking to attract existing migrants to work in agriculture by setting up agriculture job-matching centers close to farms. Job matching and job search programs can also be targeted to migrants returning...
from abroad who are jobless, but may have skills learned from working abroad that could be deployed in local labor markets.

- **Ensure that migration regulations meet the needs of migrants and employers.** Regulations regarding migration programs can be adjusted to ensure that labor market needs can be met including by lengthening visas for existing workers and facilitating new admissions (MPI 2020b). Germany lifted a ban it had imposed on seasonal agricultural workers entering the country. Farmers will be able to bring in 80,000 workers in April and May. The seasonal workers will arrive by plane, receive a health check, and be required to be separated from local workers for two weeks. In its EPS temporary migration program, Korea relaxed regulations on sector of employment for temporary migrants to allow them to work in agriculture, and has permitted visiting family members to seek seasonal agriculture jobs. In Spain, it was recently announced that work permits will be provided to young immigrants who arrived in Spain as unaccompanied minors and who have now turned 18 and have residency but not work permits. Canada created an exception to restrictions on international travel by specifically allowing temporary workers to enter Canada and stay after a 14-day isolation period. Korea has also extended the job search period for migrant workers seeking to change jobs. New Zealand has extended the duration of temporary work, student, visitor, limited, or interim visas due to expire between April 2 and July 9, including work permits for seasonal workers from the Pacific under the Recognized Seasonal Employer scheme. Australia has allowed Pacific islanders under the Seasonal Worker Program and Pacific Labor Scheme to extend their visas for up to 12 months, while also relaxing employment rules for those employed in agriculture under the Working Holiday Maker visa. Australia has also allowed seasonal workers to change employer. Vietnam has proposed easing its COVID-19-related restrictions on international entry to allow high-skilled foreign nationals to enter the country because of a shortage of qualified replacements.

- **Other employment promotion policies.** Several other employment promotion policies can be considered, particularly for internal migrants. Public works could help address the significant unemployment that is likely to result from the COVID-19 outbreak. In the short term, a public works program could be adapted to address immediate needs associated with controlling the transmission of COVID-19 (e.g. assistance with contact tracing, at testing sites, with transmission control). In the longer term as transmission concerns become less significant, more traditional public works programs could be deployed incorporating appropriate health and safety measures. China has created such jobs for migrants who are temporarily unable to go to their job sites. Significant job loss, particularly in certain sectors like the services and tourism, creates an opportunity to upskill and reskill idle workers for jobs in sectors likely to rebound as the COVID-19 outbreak is controlled. Such training could be provided in the form of e-learning where possible and could seek to reskill and upskill workers in sectors that were growing prior to the COVID-19 crisis. China has launched an online skills development program including for migrant workers.

5) **Remittances.** The COVID-19 outbreak is likely to have a significant impact on the ability of migrants to remit money. Remittances are a key channel of support for households throughout the world. To support the recovery of remittances in the short term, governments should classify remittance service providers as essential services that are permitted to operate despite transmission control measures given that they follow social distancing guidelines. Governments should also support the remittances industry with instruments to help it manage credit and liquidity risks. In the medium term, governments can promote digital models of remitting, support universal financial access, enhance payment systems, and help develop the regulatory capacity necessary to support
Even with these measures, however, the success of economic stimulus efforts in developed economies and in net remitting countries will have a large impact on whether remittance flows recover in the medium term after the initial impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak. Qatar has undertaken measures related to remittances in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Online remittances have been introduced to replace exchange houses with companies mandated to educate workers about online remittance services.
Table 2: Potential activities in support of migrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Temporary international</th>
<th>Informal international</th>
<th>Long-term international</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>Return</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Expand eligibility for existing safety net programs to migrants</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Include migrants in safety net programs responding to COVID-19</td>
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<td>Provide access to free and low-cost testing and treatment</td>
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<td>Provide food assistance</td>
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<td>Provide housing subsidies or alternative housing arrangements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide transportation subsidies or transportation arrangements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide cash grants</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Exempt, reduce, or defer social insurance contributions for employers</td>
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<td>Provide employment subsidies to employers</td>
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<td>Use migration regulations to protect employment</td>
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<td>Deploy job search, matching, and placement services</td>
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<td>3) Adjust migration regulations to protect migrants and fill shortages</td>
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<td>Launch COVID-19-responsive public works</td>
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<td>Launch training programs leveraging e-learning where possible</td>
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<td>4) Classify remittance service providers (RSPs) as essential services</td>
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<td>Create instruments to help RSPs manage credit and liquidity risks</td>
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Implementing these policies will require adapting to the special characteristics and needs of migrants. Policymakers will need to take into account the potential for mainstreaming, the challenges migrants face accessing services, and the unique challenge of targeting and delivering services to migrants.

**Mainstreaming.** Government should seek to utilize existing programs to address the needs of migrants wherever possible. This recognizes that both migrants and locals will face significant disruptions due to the COVID-19 outbreak, will help ensure that all groups are provided protections against getting and transmitting the disease, will reduce administrative complexity, and will help allow migrants to access benefits more quickly.

**Access.** Migrants face significant challenges accessing social protection benefits that must be taken into account in responses to the COVID-19 outbreak (UNDESA 2018; Hopkins, Bastagli, and Hagen-Zanker 2016). Formal restrictions at times exclude migrants from these benefits. Informal migrants who have not used legal channels for international migration are typically not eligible for benefits. Even legal migrants may be ineligible due to discretionary eligibility criteria such as requirements for property ownership or evidence of integration. In some countries, utilizing benefits has implications for renewal of residency permits or for family reunification. Such formal restrictions arise in the case of internal migrants as well due to population registration and residency requirements. Both internal and international migrants face other barriers to access social protection. Program registration and benefits claims procedures can be complex and require documentation that migrants may not have. Language barriers may also arise. These will be important considerations as policymakers consider creating new programs for migrants and making existing programs available to them.

**Targeting.** Targeting migrants for assistance requires identifying them. As for delivery of benefits generally, this is done more easily if migrants already appear in social registries. In the case of international migration, migrants who have migrated using legal channels ("formal migrants") are typically registered with destination country authorities. These migrants may also be listed on social registries via participation in health insurance, workplace injury, or other social protection schemes. These migrants may also be registered with source country authorities, whether in administrative databases or through instruments like migrant welfare funds, that can allow source countries to identify beneficiaries abroad for assistance (e.g. repatriation assistance).

Migrants who have not used legal channels ("informal migrants"), however, are unlikely to be registered with destination country authorities (though there are exceptions). Extending assistance to these migrants is more challenging, and will likely require innovative means of identifying beneficiaries including self-targeting (e.g. through the provision of free food or accommodation), self-enrollment (e.g. requesting potential beneficiaries to enroll themselves to receive benefits), or cooperation with telecommunications companies and remittance services providers (e.g. to identify phone numbers and/or bank accounts where benefits could be directed). Extending benefits to informal migrants will raise concern among them that identifying themselves to receive benefits could result in legal penalties and/or deportation. Assurances may need to be provided that registration and receipt of benefits will not have legal consequences.

The process for identifying internal migrants for assistance is parallel to that for identifying international migrants. Where internal migrants appear on social registries, targeting will be easier. Where they do not, other methods like self-targeting, self-enrollment, or identification through
telecommunications providers will be necessary. Thailand provides an example of a process for identifying informal internal migrant workers: beneficiaries outside of the social security system could be identified using their national ID, which can be linked to existing social assistance programs with benefits delivered via the e-payment system linked to their national ID.

**Delivery.** Delivery of assistance to migrants will need to take both the unique circumstances of migrants and public health into account. Any program to facilitate the access of migrants to labor markets facing shortages will require careful consideration of worker screening, social distancing while at work, and what to do and what benefits to provide in cases in which a worker falls ill (MPI 2020b). Accommodations may need to be provided to migrants in cases in which job loss also results in loss of housing. These accommodations will need to be adapted to comply with social distancing and transmission control measures. Where delivery of cash assistance is not possible and food aid is needed, delivery of this assistance will also need to take these measures into account (e.g. by adapting pre-existing food distribution systems to offer pre-packaged meals). In both cases, connections can be created to health services to help migrants in need of medical assistance and limit the spread of COVID-19. Overall, solutions to the challenges of distributing benefits may require a shift to greater reliance on digital and mobile transfers, spreading out disbursement dates and times, relying on alternative delivery means (e.g. helicopters or drones, government-provided services for those in quarantine), and many other adjustments.

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**WORLD BANK OPERATIONAL RESPONSE**

The World Bank has mobilized resources to assist and prioritize quick, decisive, and effective responses to the COVID-19 outbreak in two phases. The Phase One response is a $4 billion facility primarily focused on health sector interventions, though support for vulnerable households can be considered as has been done, for example, in Pakistan and Tajikistan. Phase Two, which is under Board consideration, is a $150 billion multisectoral facility to be rolled out for the next 15 months. The facility focuses on: 1) protecting the poor and vulnerable; 2) supporting businesses; and 3) strengthening economic resilience and the speed of recovery. These three pillars are aligned with the instruments described in this note. A full range of lending instruments (IPFs, DPFs, DPOs, PForRs) will be available to flexibly tailor responses to client needs. Just-in-time technical advisory services and analytical support can also be provided to help clients design and implement effective responses.

The SPJ GP is working closely with countries around the world to deploy social protection systems and programs to address the challenges faced by migrants during the COVID-19 outbreak. Countries such as China, Brazil, India, and the Philippines are building on their existing social protection platforms to provide safety nets, employment services, and social insurance to additional beneficiaries, including international and internal migrant workers. For example, in China households with unemployed members are now eligible to apply for Dibao and temporary social assistance. Brazil is following a similar approach to reach informal and self-employed workers, and the government of India is considering similar interventions with the financial support of the World Bank. By mobilizing financial resources and providing technical assistance, the World Bank team can support the expansion of current social protection systems to serve the migrant populations affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Prior to the crisis, the World Bank increasingly supported governments around the world on issues related to migration. During the past 18 years, the World Bank has implemented more than $750 million of lending operations on migration of which almost $100 million went to international migration. The World Bank provides financial and advisory services on labor mobility in 26 countries, and new requests emerge regularly. The topics covered by these projects include skills development,
job search, recruitment and placement, access to social and public services in origin and destination countries, and protection of workers’ rights (World Bank 2016).

Migration-related projects financed by the World Bank include elements that would be relevant to address the challenges faced by migrants during the COVID-19 outbreak and recovery. A number of World Bank-financed projects can provide ideas about potential interventions to provide immediate assistance and temporary safety nets to migrant workers, ensure reintegration and livelihoods restoration, and strengthen employability. The Emergency Repatriation and Livelihood Restoration for Migrant Workers Project in Bangladesh supported the Bangladeshi Government in: 1) repatriating its migrant workers who had fled conflict in Libya in a timely manner; and 2) providing a one-time cash grant as a transitional safety net measure to help the repatriated migrants meet immediate basic needs and commence the process of livelihood restoration. Though not designed to respond to a specific crisis, the Rural Migrant Skills Development and Employment Project in China is very relevant to the current situation because it addressed the vulnerabilities and limited economic opportunities of rural migrants. The project included activities related to skills development, employment services, and worker protection designed specifically for rural migrants.
References


### Annex 1: Migration-related responses to COVID-19 around the world

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Beneficiary</th>
<th>Sending or Receiving</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
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</table>
| Australia | International | Receiving | • Extending visa duration for workers from the Pacific islands already in Australia under the Seasonal Worker Program and Pacific Labor Scheme to address farm labor shortages  
• Removal of visa barriers to moving from one approved employer to another for seasonal workers  
• Actively seeking to move migrant workers under the Pacific Labor Scheme to new employers where existing employment has ceased as a result of the crisis  
• Working holiday maker visa holders employed in agriculture are now exempt from the six month work limitation with the one employer and eligible for a further visa to keep working in these sectors if their current visa is due to expire  
• Australian Minister for Families and Social Services indicated to extend Special Benefit eligibility, but for only certain categories of migrant workers (and not Pacific island workers under the Seasonal Worker Program or Pacific Labor Scheme)  
• Temporary migrant workers are able to withdraw up to $10,000 in superannuation each year (for two years) where unemployed |
| Austria | International | Receiving | • On March 30, 231 care workers were flown to Austria to provide round-the-clock care in the region of Lower Austria, which organized flights from the Bulgarian capital Sofia and the Romanian city of Timisoara. |
| Brazil | Internal | - | • Considering extending coverage in response to the crisis, topping up CCT Bolsa Familia and the social pension scheme  
• Recently announced a new benefit to all informal/self-employed workers of $120 per worker per month (for 3 months), being them registered in Cadastro Unico registry or on demand without asking too many questions (becoming virtually a UBI). |
| Bahrain | International | Receiving | • Bahrain’s Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA) announced an amnesty for irregular migrants until December 31, 2020. Regularization of residency status will not be subject to fines or to the requirement to leave the country.  
• Starting on April 1, 2020, LMRA also cancelled monthly work permit fees and fees related to issuing and renewing work permits for three months  
• The LMRA also announced that it has cut fees for the Flexi-Permit by 60-78%. The Flexi Permit now costs BD 167 (443 USD) for one year and the cost of renewal will be BD 72 (191 USD). It was earlier BD 427 annual fees and BD 322 for renewal.  
• Flexi-Permit holders will not be charged any monthly fees until the end of June. The LMRA’s Flexi Permit website has been updated accordingly. This move will be especially beneficial for those who already have the Flexi-Permit but cannot afford renewal fees amidst the current economic downturn and loss of jobs, and for those who wish to regularise their status but cannot find full-time employment. |

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2 The interventions listed in this table do not cover the whole set of migration-related interventions applied in different countries in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.
### Belgium
- **International**
- **Receiving**
- Applications for the Flexi-Permit will be done remotely but migrants must be present in person to collect the Flexi-Permit and provide biometric details. Irregular workers will not need their passports to apply.

### Canada
- **International**
- **Receiving**
- Asylum seekers are given access to the labor market provided that they have properly submitted their application to the office of the commissioner general for refugees and stateless persons. They will have the opportunity to work during the duration of the procedure, including during the duration of any appeal to the Aliens Litigation Council.

### China
- **Internal**
- **-**
- **Cash transfer**
  - Cash transfer for retention migrant population in Wuhan. One-time cash assistance of RMB 3000.
  - Unemployment assistance. Using the unemployment insurance fund to provide cash support for those who are temporarily unemployed, but do not meet the conditions to claim for unemployment insurance benefits.
  - Unemployment insurance benefits. The unemployed workers can claim for the unemployment insurance benefits.
  - Households with unemployed members could apply for Dibao and temporary social assistance.
- **Demand side intervention**
  - Exempt, reduction and postponement of social insurance contributions, housing funds, and utility costs.
  - Wage and job subsidies by using unemployment insurance funds to stabilize employment.
  - Tax exempt, financial and credit support to increase liquidity of enterprise.
  - Encourage localities to create more job opportunities by investing locally.
- **Employment services**
  - "Point to Point" chartered transportation services (buses, training, flights) to send migrant workers from hometowns to enterprises. Local governments cover the total or partial transportation costs.
  - Public works. Government will create public welfare job posts (such as sanitation and epidemic prevention) for migrant workers who are temporarily unable to go out and have difficulty in living.
  - Online job fairs, interview and recruitments. MOHRSS provided an online platform to serve for this purpose.
  - Online skilling development program financed by the unemployment insurance funds.

### France
- **International**
- **Receiving**
- The unemployment agency in France has created a website designed to match farmers with workers, and will allow workers who fill agricultural jobs to continue receiving benefits and income if they have been furloughed.
- France extended residence permits for 3 months to ensure that access to health care and social security is not interrupted.

### Germany
- **International**
- **Receiving**
- Most support provided to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak is provided irrespective of migration status though ordinary restrictions still apply (e.g. expanded compensation for short-term work applies irrespective of the migration status of the worker, immediate assistance and stabilization fund set up to support businesses).
- Created a website to match German volunteers with farmers, leading 42,000 to sign up.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Measures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Receiving</td>
<td>• Greece has suspended asylum services, but has said that asylum applications and residency permits will remain valid during the suspension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Receiving</td>
<td>• The Commissioner for Labour has given in-principle consent for all Foreign Domestic Helper that expire on or before March 31, 2020, to be extended up to May 31, 2020.</td>
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<td>• The measure now also covers contracts that expire on June 30, 2020, and that can be extended to July 31, 2020.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td></td>
<td>• The government is considering accessing World Bank financing that would enable state governments to provide support to migrants without regard to their state of residence and make access to certain benefits portable across state boundaries.</td>
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<td>• The Ministry of Home Affairs has requested all state governments to flexibly use resources in the State Disaster Response Funds to:</td>
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<td>o provide a package of shelter, food and free testing to vulnerable people, including internal migrants, stranded due to lockdown measures in their respective areas.</td>
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<td>o introduce employment retention policies to ensure that workers, including migrants, receive their wages without deductions during the lockdown</td>
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<td>o ensure that rent payment for workers, including migrants, is suspended for one month and that workers and students are not forced to vacate their accommodation during the lockdown period</td>
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<td>While these measures have recently been announced, enforcement will be key to ensure that migrants receive adequate support</td>
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<td>• The government is also planning to top up pre-existing social assistance programs (such as PM-KSN, MGNREGS and UJWALA) as part of its COVID-19 social protection response. However, these programs are implemented at the state level and automatically exclude migrants as applicants must prove that they are residents of a particular state as part of the eligibility determination process. While the government could consider a direct cash transfer to all migrants by linking the near-universal ration card and Aadhaar to trigger payments, any such transfer will require the government to relax rules which target benefits to state residents.</td>
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<td>• State governments are relying on Kudumbashree groups and self-help groups (in Tripura and South Goa) to run community kitchens for migrant workers, homeless persons, and destitute households.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Sending</td>
<td>• Indonesia migrant workers protection agency (BP2MI) has facilitated returned of Indonesian migrants from Malaysia (undocumented as well as documented owing to lockdowns in Malaysia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Receiving</td>
<td>• The Department of Social Protection has introduced a COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment to assist all workers, irrespective of their migration status. Payments of €350 per week will be available to employees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and the self-employed who have lost their job on (or after) March 13 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment will be in place for the duration of the crisis.

- The Social Inclusion Unit of the National Health System promotes that COVID-19 testing is open to all who need assistance, regardless of status

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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Details</th>
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| Italy   | International Receiving | • Starting on April 1, 2020, Refugees, Asylum Seekers and other Holders of residence permits Can Apply for the € 600 income subsidy for the month of March 2020 under the Cure Italy stimulus. Eligible workers also include Farm Workers, farm workers with fixed term contracts and other categories of agricultural workers enrolled in the annual registers who can prove to have worked at least 50 days as duly paid farm hands  
  - Refugees and Asylum Seekers Who Are Employed Can also Apply for a Babysitting Voucher via the INPS social security office website. The voucher has a top limit of 600-euro per family unit with children less than 12 years old and must be used exclusively for babysitting services.  
  - Refugees and Asylum Seekers Who Are Employed Can also Apply for a 15 days extraordinary leave effective from March 5th until schools officially reopen. Benefits include: 1) 50% salary for parents with children up to 12 years old; 2) No salary for parents with children ages 12 – 16; 3) 50% salary for parents with severely disabled children (No age limitation)  
  - All residence permits expiring between January 31, 2020 and April 15, 2020 are now valid until June 15, 2020.  
  - All recognition and identity documents, issued by the competent Italian authorities, which have expired or expired in the days following 18 March 2020 are extended to 31 August 2020. |
| Japan   | International Receiving | • Foreigners whose visa will expire between March and June will benefit from a three-month visa extension  
  - Work-permit holders who are currently abroad and cannot enter Japan due to travel restrictions will be allowed to return even if the re-entry permit has been expired. |
| Kazakhstan | International Receiving | • Introduced flexibility in the Employment Permit System to minimize impacts on firms and EPS workers by:  
  - Extending the employment contract by 50 days for those whose employment terms are approaching;  
  - Supporting recruitment of new EPS workers, who cannot leave their home countries, from other countries of origin;  
  - Operating EPS-related business through one-stop service  
  - Extending the job search period for EPS job changers.  
  - All EPS workers are also subject to fiscal measures to support SMEs – such as employment retention/ paid-leave subsidies  
  - In response to no new inflows of seasonal agriculture workers from abroad, the government has taken measures to utilize foreigners who are currently in the country, including:  
  - setting up additional agriculture job-matching centers close to farmers,  
  - relaxing sector regulations to match job-seeking EPS workers (even if whose permit is for the manufacturing sector, for instance) with seasonal agriculture jobs  
  - Permitting people in Korea under a family visa, to seek seasonal agriculture jobs.  
  - These measures are in parallel with local governments/communities' actions to boost volunteering by natives.  
  - Irregular foreign workers |

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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Receiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Receiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Sending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Receiving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- All irregular foreign workers have access to free COVID-19 testing and treatment. During their treatment, the government provides partial income support. During the crisis, hospitals are not mandated to ask their status and to report their admissions (personal details) to the Immigration/labor authorities.
- Irregulars who leave Korea voluntarily by June will be exempt from penalties and from the no-future-entry rule.
- Employers who voluntarily report the employment of irregulars by end March will be exempt from financial penalties as well as from the EPS penalty - ineligibility to hire EPS workers in the future. Furthermore, taking into account difficulties with new hires, the employers can keep the employment of irregulars for 3 additional months, before sending them back to their home countries.
- The Thai Ministry of Labor is coordinating with the Korean labor offices to make sure that Thai laborers receive pending wages and benefits.
- The Government introduced a special amnesty for More than 4,300 undocumented Bangladeshi migrant workers. Their expenses -- airfare, food and accommodation -- during repatriation will be borne by Kuwait government. Undocumented workers will be able to return home without any fine and will be eligible to re-enter the Gulf country through legal channels in the future.
- Extension of eligibility to undocumented migrants for COVID-19 tests and treatment without payment and threat of deportation.
- Foreign worker levy cut by 25% for those with permit ending Dec 31, 2020, but discount not applicable for domestic helpers.
- The Livelihood and Food Security Fund (LIFT) announced new funding to support about 5.9 million people, including: migrants, the elderly, internally displaced people, pregnant women and those with children aged under two. Specifically, $2.9 million are allocated for immediate assistance to migrants to prevent the spread of the virus and to provide economic and legal support. The allocation includes $1.7 million to support an estimated 310,000 internal migrants in peri-urban areas, and $1.2 million for 110,000 returned migrant workers.
- The government has automatically extended to 25 September all work, student, visitor, limited or interim visas due to expire between 2 April and 9 July 2020.
- Migrants under the Recognized Seasonal Employer program are eligible for sick leave scheme that is part of NZ's COVID-19 economic response package.
- As part of the COVID-19 Economic Response Package, RSE workers are also entitled to government funding, equating to NZ$85.50 per worker per week, if they cannot work during the lockdown because their employer's business is not operating or the employer cannot afford to pay them due to reduced business activity.
- If an RSE worker is required to self-isolate while in New Zealand, due to illness or close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case, they are also eligible for the government’s wage subsidy. RSE employers apply for the subsidy on behalf of their workers, and provide accommodation and pastoral care facilities during the 14-day isolation period. Workers will continue to pay their accommodation and other living costs.
- Under existing medical insurance, RSE workers are entitled to receive medical treatment for any presenting conditions, including COVID-19, and treatment for the virus will be covered by New Zealand’s Ministry of Health.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>International Receiving</th>
<th>Panama</th>
<th>International Receiving</th>
<th>The Government of Panamá will offer shelter to around 2,500 migrants at three immigration stations at Panama’s borders with Colombia and Costa Rica. The government has also provided masks and PPE in shelters in Darien and Gualaca.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>International Receiving</td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>International Receiving</td>
<td>The Ministry of Health has summoned foreign health workers to fill gaps resulting from the infection of several doctors in the country.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>International Sending</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>International Sending</td>
<td>The Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) in the Philippines recently announced that cash assistance amounting to $200 (over PHP10,000) will be provided to overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) whose work were affected by the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic. The Government targets to reach 70,000 OFWs. To avail of the program, OFWs must submit their certificate of employment issued by their agencies. Their application will be evaluated and processed by the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) or Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>International Receiving</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>International Receiving</td>
<td>The Polish government extended legality of stay of foreigners residing in Poland on the basis of short-term residence titles, including visa-free travel. Extension is valid until the end of the 30th day following the date of cancellation of the state of epidemic emergency or the state of epidemic – depending on which one was the last in force.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>International Receiving</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>International Receiving</td>
<td>Portugal has granted immigrants and asylum seekers whose applications are being processed temporary residency rights, which gives them access to public services such as national health services and welfare benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>International Receiving</td>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>International Receiving</td>
<td>Qatar has announced that full salaries will be provided to migrant workers in quarantine or treatment by employers, and has set aside funds to support companies. Has said that workers unable to return home if their jobs are terminated will be able to remain “with proper lodging and food.” Online remittances have been introduced to replace exchange houses with companies mandated to educate workers about online remittance services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>International Receiving</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>International Receiving</td>
<td>Reduction in the dependent expat levy—paid by the head of the household for his or her dependents living in the country—for the next three months. Automatic renewal of expired residencies for three months and correction of illegal status. Extension of 6 months for the exit and re-entry visas of expatriates abroad. Cancellation of fines for delays in payment of dependent residency fees and levies by head of the household for the next three months. Exemption for businesses for the next 6 months of work permit fees and deferral of all financial dues. Utilization of 3,600+ public school buildings as accommodation of expatriate workers/ migrants to move them out from the currently very dense areas. Provision of accommodation and food to all migrants/expatriates who are on medical isolation. Repatriation of Pilgrims (from Meccah and Medina) administered by Ministry of Hajj and MOH: followed by medical isolation at the hotels in Jeddah and Meccah and tested negative for COVID. As per Royal Decree (April 3), provision of free treatment for all COVID cases (including expatriates, tourists and illegal workers in the country). Permission for delays and deferral of electricity and rent payment. Revision of labor law to allow firms for 6 months to reduce salaries corresponding to reduction in working hours, put worker on annual leave, put worker on unpaid leave subject to agreement with the worker. Temporary suspension of the wage protection system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country</td>
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| Singapore | International | Receiving | Permission for foreign workers to work for other employers (expansion of Ajeer system)  
- Exemption from expatriate levy for workers whose iqama (resident permit) has expired before 30 June 2020. Their iqama will be extended for 3 months without charge.  
- Singapore provided $35 a day in housing support to assist with employers’ costs due to Malaysia-imposed restrictions preventing frequent commuter workers from returning to Malaysia. The assistance has now terminated.iii  
- To help ease labor costs, the government announced that monthly Foreign Worker Levy due in April 2020 will be waived. The government will also provide employers with a Foreign Worker Levy Rebate of S$750 for each work permit or S Pass holder, based on previous levies paid in 2020.iv |
| Slovak Republic | International | Receiving | Extending residency permissions for non-citizensv |
| Spainiv | International | Receiving | The Spanish government has announced the extension of work permits for foreign workers whose contracts would expire during the period between the declaration of emergency and June 30  
- The Spanish government has announced that work permits will be provided to young immigrants who arrived to Spain as unaccompanied minors who have turned 18 and have residency permits but not work permitsvi |
| Sri Lankałvi | International | Sending | To help its overseas migrant workers deal with the coronavirus, Sri Lanka's Ministry of Foreign Relations has launched an online portal where citizens can voice their concerns, |
| Thailand | International | Sending | Thailand has just initiated a multi-prong package for Thai workers forced to return from Korea due to the outbreak. This includes:  
- Those who are members of Overseas Workers Fund will be entitled to THB15,000 compensation (also available to member workers who return from other countries that have announced a Covid-19 outbreak);  
- The Thai Ministry of Labor will coordinate with labor offices Korea to make sure that Thai laborers receive pending wages and benefits (the Department of Employment has identified over 81,562 domestic jobs for Thai laborers returning from overseas) |
| Internal | - | - | Providing a cash transfer to informal and self-employed workers |
| United Arab Emirates | International | Receiving | Firms are encouraged to consider alternative methods to reduce costs other than workers’ termination. A new decree allows firms to provide migrant workers, subject to mutual agreement, with the alternative of working remotely, taking paid leave, unpaid leave, temporary or permanent reduction in salaries.  
- Firms can register workers on a job matching virtual platform in case workers are terminated.  
- Employers must pay housing and other allowances until the worker finds another job or leaves the country. Employers also need to pay the end of service benefits  
- Extension of residence permits and visas until December 2020 |
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<th>Country</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Action</th>
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| United Kingdom | International Receiving | • The United Kingdom has extended visas until May 31, 2020 for those whose leave expired on or after January 24, 2020 and are in the United Kingdom because of travel restrictions or self-isolation related to COVID-19.  
• Automatically extended the visas of foreign doctors for one year  |
| United States | International Receiving | • Has issued updated guidance on visas for medical professionals and residents  
• Has issued an extension for submission of documents for extensions of employment authorizations  
• Has lifted the in-person interview requirement for most foreign applicants applying for an H-2A agricultural guest worker permits  | Has issued updated guidance on visas for medical professionals and residents  
Has issued an extension for submission of documents for extensions of employment authorizations  
Has lifted the in-person interview requirement for most foreign applicants applying for an H-2A agricultural guest worker permits  
**State of California**  
• The Governor also announced $125 million in disaster relief assistance for undocumented immigrants impacted by COVID-19. California will provide $75 million in disaster relief assistance and philanthropic partners have committed to raising an additional $50 million.  
• California’s $75 million Disaster Relief Fund will support undocumented Californians impacted by COVID-19 who are ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits and disaster relief, including the CARES Act, due to their immigration status.  
• Approximately 150,000 undocumented adult Californians will receive a one-time cash benefit of $500 per adult with a cap of $1,000 per household to deal with the specific needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals can apply for support beginning next month. |
| Uzbekistan | International Receiving | • Labor market interventions under the 10 trillion soum Anti-Crisis fund include support for labor migrants via vocational ad language training  |  |
| Vietnam | International Sending | • Vietnam’s National Assembly is debating a revision of the Fund for Overseas Employment Support, in part as a reaction to the COVID-19 outbreak, that would allow the fund to be spent on preventing risks for laborers while working abroad and educating workers abroad on laws relevant to them  |
| Vietnam | International Receiving | • Proposed easing its COVID-19-related restrictions on international entry to allow high-skilled foreign nationals to enter the country because of a shortage of qualified replacements  |
| Vietnam | Internal | - | Considering a cash transfer to informal and self-employed workers  |
Endnotes

vi https://www.ft.com/content/e27a9395-db47-4e7b-b054-3ec6ba4cbb3
xiii https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/alarm
xix https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202004/02/WS5e853c68a3101282172833ce.html
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