



14 July 2021

Migrant Working Group (MWG)

Press Statement: The Department of Employment's letter to cancel healthcare assistance to migrants condemned

On 5 July 2021, the Director General of the Department of Employment signs a most urgent memo on the revocation of public health schemes to help migrants. Addressed to the Directors of the Bangkok Offices of Employment Region 1-10, the memo essentially states that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the state has conducted proactive testing in risk prone area according to the directive on 25 June 2021. As it has turned out, the Covid-19 outbreak has spread extensively due to the proactive testing to identify and suppress cluster infections. Meanwhile, hospitals are facing a public health scarcity in terms of the number of medical personnel, the number of beds, ventilators and medical equipment which fail to meet the demand of new infected persons. The Minister of Labour has therefore decided to rescind the public health project (for migrant workers).

The Migrant Working Group (MWG) is gravely concerned about the Ministry of Labour's policy related to the management of migrant workers since the outbreak of Covid-19 began in 2020, after which nearly one million migrant workers have been missing from the database of legally registered workers. As a result, they have been deprived of their access to remedy and subject to discrimination which is a breach to Thailand's laws and international human rights laws. Meanwhile, the latest outbreak has caused widespread infection among migrant workers. According to the Department of Disease Control's (DDC), from April to 12 July 2021, there have been cumulatively 47,550 infections among workers from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. But since 27 June 2021, the government has simply shut down construction worker camps while workers are denied access to remedy due to such discrimination. Help has to be mobilized within the private sector to help the desperate workers.

The signing of the most urgent memo by the Director General of the Department of Employment on 5 July 2021 to scrap the healthcare schemes for migrants reflects the lack of capacity and the failure of the Ministry of Labour's leaderships. It has led to an inequality among people in society and discrimination. Such failure may also make the policy to control the outbreak ineffective since a large group of people are being left behind and neglected.

Given the above situation, the Migrant Working Group (MWG) have these demands for the government;

1. Expedite the effort to conduct a proactive test among migrant workers as soon and as inclusive as possible, particularly in the ten dark red provinces or ensuring the migrant workers have self-test kits at their disposal.

2. Expedite the effort to provide capacity building to core members or migrant volunteers in the community and support the effort by the community of migrant workers and civil society organizations to conduct home Isolation and community Isolation in coloration with local hospitals to offer care to the Patient Under Investigation (PUI) and the

asymptomatic infected persons or those with minimal symptom (green) to ensure beds are available for patients with serious conditions (yellow and red)/

3. Expedite the effort to vaccinate all migrant workers, documented or undocumented, to create a herd immunity.

4. Expedite the effort to develop referral system to address the need of seriously ill Covid-19 patients.

5. The Ministry of Labour must monitor and ensure employers promptly register their employees in the social security system and such workers should be allowed to retrospectively claim their right to social security benefits including healthcare. For migrant workers uncovered by the social security system, an effort should be made to investigate the matter and to arrange for them to buy health insurance.

6. The Ministry of Labour should show its responsibility to offer remedy and humanitarian assistance to the migrant workers.

Stop testing will not help to curtail the outbreak and there shall be no safety as long as everyone is not safe.

With respect in human rights and human dignity

Migrant Working Group (MWG)

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