

# Covid-19 in Malaysia: Protection of Migrant Workers in this Pandemic Situation

Md. Tuhin Mia,<sup>\*1</sup> Sharmin Jahan Putul<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *PhD Candidate, Ahmad Ibrahim Kulliyah Of Laws, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: rajtuhin92@gmail.com*

<sup>2</sup> *PhD Candidate, Faculty of Law, University of Malaya (UM), Jalan Universiti, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: sharminputul@gmail.com.*

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## ABSTRACT

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Covid-19 Pandemic is an alarming situation of the job market, especially for migrant workers in the world. The country Malaysia already is suffering critical condition in terms of facing coronavirus as well as migrant workers joblessness extremely. Migrant workers have contributed enormously for the rapid development of this country. During lockdown for this pandemic, the worst thing is companies are terminating the employment contract with foreign workers without any prior notice. This article will find out problems migrant workers are facing during the covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia and their protection by the government and other institutions based on secondary data collection.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to information from the 2018 Labour Force Survey (LFS), there are 2.2 million migrant workers in Malaysia, accounting for 15% of the country's employed population (DOS, 2019). The number from different

sources increased from 4 million to 7 million, most of which referred to undocumented migrants as the majority of the group (Khalidi and Muhamad, 2020). Considering their size, ignoring migrant workers will be the key to the Malaysian people. With the removal of Malaysian Coronavirus (Covid-19) in 2019, migrant workers, especially undocumented workers, are among the most immobilised. They are often forced to live under squeezing conditions that require basic hygiene, which makes them highly susceptible to infection and spread of coronavirus. Controlling the disease at this gathering is of great significance for controlling the infection of the entire Malaysian population (Khalidi and Muhamad, 2020). The Malaysian government announced the Movement Control Order (MCO), which has been expanded several times in this way until June 9.

Covid-19 is destroying the well-being and occupation of workers and employers worldwide. It is nothing more than a neighbourhood, but a comprehensive test that requires a response from all over the world. Covid-19 will have a significant impact on currency and employment (ILO: 2020a). In general, a large number of organizations face the risk of bankruptcy, which has a serious impact on employment. In many countries, social separation and general blockades have become part of daily work, with dire consequences for the job market and individual occupations (ILO: 2020b). The blockade measures taken to alleviate the pandemic have greatly replaced the introductory communication vertigo and travel restrictions. Although these measures are noteworthy, the impact on the department is limited. Unimportant organisation and manufacture experienced the rapid impact of lockdown, including reduced working hours and work misfortune. This incredible emergency has wide-ranging consequences for all, and should be achieved through the actions of the whole society and through the actions of the government and its social helpers in the field of work. It calls for practical tripartite social dialogue and cooperation, unites the government, employers' and workers' associations, conducts a far-reaching needs assessment covering all metrics (welfare, social and financial), and develops successful procedures and strategies to mitigate emergency situations financial results ensure that workers and their families, especially the most unprotected migrant workers, are protected from loss of job and salary (ILO: 2020c).

Measures taken to control the spread of disease between the country and the country have caused significant disruptions in the transportation system and labour market, which has severely hit migrant workers. Subsequent settlement reductions will have these negative effects on migrant's family (Moroz et al., 2020). According to the UN's assessment of transport stocks and the World Bank's settlement information, more than 270 million people currently live outside their country of birth, and more than \$ 620 billion of remittances have been sent to their countries of origin. 90% of Covid-19 cases have occurred in only 20 countries (except China). Migrants from these 20 countries make up 50% of the world, and they send 55% of the world's remittances home (Moroz et al., 2020).

## **POSITION OF MIGRANT WORKERS AND COVID-19 IN MALAYSIA**

On April 10, 79 kinds of pollutants were found in three buildings in Kuala Lumpur. These three buildings are Selangor Building in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya Building and Menara City One which has been always locked (Ravindran, 2020). Selangor and Malaya have about 6,000 residents, of which 97% are migrant workers (Zolkepli et al., 2020). On May 1, large-scale captures were conducted in these three structures. The United Nations in Malaysia, the Malaysian Bar Association and a coalition of 62 Common Social Associations (CSOs) conveyed concerns about this activity (ILO: 2020d). On May 2, another 28 diseases were found in a construction site in Kuala Lumpur (ILO: 2020d). During the MCO, some migrant workers were apparently arrested while trying to leave the country (New Starits Times, 2020).

Speaking at the daily briefing, Noor Hisham said that “the Ministry of Health (MoH) is taking a targeted approach in testing the migrant workers. The ministry is currently focusing on those who attended the tabligh assembly at Seri Petaling Mosque from Feb 27 to March 1. We are not looking at testing all migrant workers, because the high-risk groups are those who were at the gathering in Seri Petaling” (New Starits Times, 2020). Noor Hisham declared that 23 new Covid-19 cases have been confirmed in Selangor Province, bringing the total number of private cases in Kuala Lumpur's downtown area to 166 migrant workers accounted for 150 of the totals. On the street, Malayan Mansion, another downtown area where EMCA is located, saw three other positive cases. There are 7 Covid-19 positive cases, 6 of which are migrant workers. The number of cases in the two private buildings is 51, of which 37 are of migrant nationality (Idris, 2020). Unlike neighbouring Singapore, there have not been any large-scale outbreaks of infection in the Malaysian immigration expert network, but the conditions of the blockade, the reduction in assets and the lack of attention to cash access methods have caused many people to think about the source of the next dinner (Sukumaran, 2020).

Malaysia is seeing signs of hope that it is slowly winning the battle to break the chain of coronavirus infection, but its large group of migrant workers still has uncertainties. Ms. Glorin Das, executive director of the Tenaganita Women's and Labour Rights Organization, said the possibility of a new wave of Covid-19 infection among migrant workers is “of grave concern to us” (Hassan, 2020). “These workers are vulnerable because they live in congested shared quarters and do work that does not make it possible to practise strict social distancing,” she said. “Undocumented workers are also unwilling to come forward to undergo testing for fear of being arrested,” she added. Malaysian Federation of Employers Federation CEO Badaan said that one issue, including illegal workers, is whether they are protected and whether they will seek clinical consideration when they are contaminated. “When illegals are infected with Covid-19, it will be difficult to monitor and control the outbreak,” he told to The Straits Times

(Hassan, 2020). In addition, the financial crisis may seriously affect migrant workers, especially undocumented workers, because they are enjoying paid leave or losing work leave is also not guaranteed by the social security schemes (Loganathan et al., 2019). The ILO also calls attention to the limitations of operations that will force migrant workers to work (ILO: 2020e). Although the basis for obtaining ideas is basic, these different difficulties still need to be developed.

In many Asia-Pacific countries, every three-quarters of workers in the tourism industry are temporary workers, which makes them particularly unable to defend against the negative effects of the Covid-19 emergency. The lack of basic insurance, including social security, portrays the occupation of temporary workers. Workers who work in hotels, airplanes, or other outgoing companies usually have no other option to work remotely, so the risk of Covid-19 contamination increases. For individuals who do get sick, as temporary workers, they may get distracted by public service benefits, and if they quit work due to infection or confinement, if they resign, they will have no wage replacement (ILO: 2020f). In Malaysia, as of March 20, 4% of hotel workers have been laid off, and more people took unpaid leave and cut pay (Mahalingam, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic is a well-being emergency, especially through global control estimates, which has caused serious financial and job market shock. According to the third ILO monitoring report released on April 29, global work hours in the second quarter of 2020 must be reduced by 10.5% compared to the fourth quarter of 2019, which is equivalent to 305 million full-time work. Organizations and workers in the dominant countries are affected by emergencies through emergency and abnormal channels. All areas are severely affected, including convenience and food management, retail transactions and gatherings, which brings misfortunes to occupations, earnings and wages, especially for unsecured workers (eg temporary economy, easy-going domestic helpers) and small business (ILO: 2020g).

As of now, in the absence of help in the labour market, the impact of the lockdown on workers and small-scale enterprises is more obvious, which has exacerbated Malaysia's job needs and existing imbalances. In addition, this emergency may trigger or expand complaints, doubts and bad forms of welfare management, as well as good employment and occupation, and trigger social pressure that may undermine improvement, harmony and social attachment (ILO: 2020h).

### **PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FACING MIGRANT WORKERS**

Various migrants face various difficulties. The Covid-19 explosion has caused some difficulties, which is normal for all individuals who cross introverted and global edges. In any case, certain types of immigrants and their employers face certain difficulties. These workers moved by accident (even regularly) with their work visas. The migration status is usually related to maintaining a career with a single employer. Whenever the

social insurance for these workers is obtained in any way, it is usually limited to a certain work injury salary or medical benefits, and it does not include unemployment assistance. The unfortunate employment caused by the Covid-19 explosion meant a significant loss of wages, including the use, the dispatch of household chores and the repayment of huge advances often used for relocation. Ordinary accommodation and workplaces do not help social activities and local work, making these workers gradually unable to resist Covid-19. Given that they often work and live in remote areas and may give up testing and treatment due to poor livelihoods, it may be cumbersome to enter clinical considerations. In the past, due to salary and welfare effects, work unfortunately may lead to the loss of legal status, and this status is related to employment (Moroz et al, 2020).

Although it is still very early, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the work market is still in widespread operation. From many perspectives, it has affected many (if not most). For emergency responders, health service workers, volunteers, and others in basic services and businesses, this means a sudden increase in work load and working hours, just like changes in the working process and working conditions of actions. In any case, a large number of individuals who may be looking for new positions or establishing their own organizations now believe that the situation will improve. Others are the source of elective occupations, including resource training or unable to work due to their own illness or expanded home care responsibilities. However, others are striding forward due to lack of interest or legitimate concerns about their own well-being and safety. So far, compensation and loss of salary are affecting many individuals (ILO: 2020b).

Cost is usually the limit of access to medical services. Research on the benefits of finding migrant workers in Malaysia is limited, but a 2015 survey of Bangladeshi migrant workers showed that lack of clinical protection and restrictive clinical costs are the main obstacles to finding care (Karim et al., 2015). In order to eliminate people's concerns about moderation, the Ministry of Health (MOH) pointed out in a report on January 20 that migrant workers related to coronavirus contamination or close contact with Covid-19 patients were excluded from Covid-19-related clinics. In addition to the fees, this means that any registration, evaluation, treatment and clinic fees in the office of the Ministry of Health are free (MOH, 2020). Another major obstacle that prevents migrant workers from seeking care is fear of being brought to test for lack of proper documentation (Puras, 2014). To address these fears, the Minister of Defence has publicly stated that the government will not arrest any undocumented migrant workers seeking care (Daim, 2020). Given the Malaysian history of treating undocumented migrants in the framework of human services, this response may be obvious (Khalidi and Muhamad, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic and MCO have various effects on migrant workers, even individuals who cannot work during the MCO and those who continue to work in essential services are at risk (MIER: 2020). The

Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR) advises that whenever layoffs are inevitable, migrant workers should be terminated first (The Star, 2020). Just included in the dismissal of some clothing and apparel organizations-including Esquel, pen-made garments and imperial garments-made a large number of workers unemployed. More than 50% of the representatives in Pen Apparel and Esquel are obviously migrant workers (Loone, 2020). As of mid-April, the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC) elaborated on the normal violations of migrant workers 'work rights, including: unfair results; unpaid wages; harsh daily environment; employers expect workers to continue to do redundant work Contact with employers is restricted, so there is uncertainty about employment status (ILO:2020d).

A small pile of worn shipping containers is placed under a bridge on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. Each container is divided into two layers, covered with canvas and carpeted, and ventilated by a small rotating table fan. For 65 Bangladeshi construction workers, these containers are home. At present, as the coronavirus pandemic spreads globally, their narrow living areas mean that they face more harm than a large part of mutual pollution. Since these small rooms have become workers 'isolation cells, they will certainly feel that there is no space for any physical separation when locked. In the past, many people worked most of the day, finished their work, or devoted in free energy outside. "Others were shift workers, so the house was never too full at any one time," said Sumitha Shaanthinni Kishna, director of Kuala Lumpur-based migrant rights NGO Our Journey. "But now that everyone has to stay home with the lockdown, conditions are far more cramped," she added (ILO:2020d).

### **MEASURES TAKEN BY GOVERNMENT AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS**

Despite the fact that the government has approved the start of business tasks, many employers will find that the cost of conducting a mandatory Covid-19 test for each migrant workers is overwhelming, if not restrictive. So far, organizations have been suffering from budgetary constraints imposed on development and business tasks, and can rely on the required Covid-19 tests to increase the money-related weight of these organizations. For mandatory Covid-19 testing to migrant workers, any form of monetary assistance, whether comprehensive or to some extent, is very beneficial to employers (Toh, 2020).

In March, the Malaysian government reported that it will provide free Covid-19 testing and treatment to immigrants (including undocumented workers, exiles and shelters). The government has also repeatedly stated that it will not arrest or mention migrants as part of the testing process. In any case, this strategy was changed by the Minister of Defense on April 29, announcing that every undocumented immigrant found in the EMCO area of the country will be placed in a detention facility or unique detention facility by the Ministry of Home Affairs. On May 4, the government announced that every migrant worker is required to undergo a Covid-19 cotton swab test, but at the expense of his employer

(Bedi, 2020). The Malaysian Employers' Federation (MEF) has expressed its problems with this arrangement because it attaches particular importance to the organizations that have previously fought against it. On May 5, the government announced that the Social Insurance Organization (SOCSO) can provide Covid-19 screening fees for migrant workers who join the SOCSO (Bedi and Anis, 2020). Since the establishment of the MCO, the government has been communicating food arrangements through the Ministry of Welfare and civil society organizations, with the participation of the Malaysian Volunteer Corps Department (RELA) or Malaysian Civil Defence (Wahab, 2020). Out of suspicion, civil society organizations worry that the closeness of RELA officials will prevent them from reaching undocumented workers, displaced persons and shelters through food arrangements. Civil society organizations also worry that any revelation of the undocumented migrant population will eventually lead to MCO strikes. For employers whose licenses were terminated between April 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020, Malaysia's migrant labour demand has been reduced by 25%. This reduction has no significant impact on the employers of residential workers (ILO: 2020d). The government has also proposed a series of upgrade measures to deal with the negative impact on the economy and Malaysian workers. These help and upgrade measures do not include migrant workers. The Social Security Organization (SOCSO) provides an Employment Retention Plan (ERP), and the Prime Minister's area of expertise provides two upgrade packages: the Prihatin Rakyat Economic Stimulus Package (March 27, RM250 billion) and Prihatin Plus (RM10 billion, April 6) (ILO: 2020d).

Until May 12, the conditional movement control order (CMCO) will be formulated. According to CMCO, focus experts allow some trivial organizations to resume activities by establishing clean and social isolation measures (ILO: 2020). After a surge in gatherings at a construction site in Ampang, Putrajaya only recently conducted Covid-19 tests on migrant workers. The event will start in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, and the employer will bear the cost of the test (Augustin, 2020).

Workers' organizations and civil society organizations are distributing food to migrant workers and helping to meet other emergency needs. Civil society organizations Tenaganita, Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor (PSWS) and our journey are raising assets from people to provide dry arrangements for migrant workers, especially undocumented workers, and their occupations are compensated daily. MTUC is working with the Bangladesh High Commission to reach Bangladeshi workers in 400 areas of Peninsular Malaysia, and calls on volunteers to assist in the delivery of food to these areas. Most civil society organizations are concentrated in principle towns in the Klang Valley and each state. MTUC is carrying out case support work and has filed a complaint with the Ministry of Labor to check the status of unpaid wages and the employer's desire for workers to continue to engage in unimportant occupations in processing plants during the MCO. The hotline of Tenaganita and the housing for migrant workers are open 24 hours a day. The United Nations in Malaysia, the Malaysian

Bar Association, an alliance of 62 community civil society organizations, and many different rights groups explained after a large-scale capture of sporadic migrant workers on May 1. The Malaysian Bar Association calls for a probation and regularization plan for undocumented migrants (ILO: 2020d). The United Nations in Malaysia has been promoted by the UN Resident Coordinator, including WHO, ILO, IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, WFP and other organizations. Covid-19 rapid needs assessment of evacuees and stateless persons is in Malaysia. Many United Nations organizations or agencies are also implementing joint exercises and individual exercises to connect with incompetent gatherings including migrants as part of an emergency response (ILO: 2020d).

Tenaganita and different NGOs revived together to ensure the publication of the guidelines. Associations or general social groups, such as the Malaysian Trade Union Congress, Bersih and Engage, have collected cash or food from ordinary people to support unguarded migrants (Sukumaran, 2020). Malaysia reported that another sum of financial assistance allowed delegates on unpaid leave to receive up to MYR 600 (US \$ 135) in subsidies per month for up to six months. The plan is eligible to receive unpaid leave from March 1 or a regular plan on behalf of supporters of Employment Insurance Schemes (EIS) with a compensation amount of less than 4,000 ringgit (US \$ 900) (ILO: 2020i).

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The current status of government blockade, social transfers and other related restrictions to curb the spread of Covid-19 infection have caused great difficulties in the classification of LFS information. Malaysia must continue to work to provide free Covid-19 testing for everyone (whether Malaysians or others) to ensure their overall health. Recent government efforts have shown activity, but there should be more possibilities. The government needs to establish commitments with partners including employers, international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to disseminate information about what measures migrant workers must take to ensure their own safety. Ill-treatment of migrant workers is disgraceful and disregards in fulfilling its commitment to the economy. Although the special assistance that should be provided to migrants depends on the region, legal status and resettlement method, most migrants will still need to use welfare nets because they are in compliance with monetary control measures, and they are helped by money or in kind and adapted to the impact of the emergency. As a supplement to these safety nets for internal migrants and immigrants returning from abroad, strategies to help maintain and promote employment will be particularly important. For all migrants and their families, a strategy to offset the normal decrease in settlements will be important. Projects that respond to the Covid-19 incident should be sensitive to migrants to consider the special difficulties faced by migrant workers. In order to fully ensure their well-being and right to work during a pandemic, consider the accompanying strategic recommendations.

Eliminate the fear of migration rights violations and migrant's well-being. The fear of being arrested and imprisoned may drive undocumented migrant workers to further conceal and prevent them from seeking treatment, which negatively affects their own health and spreads the danger of spreading Covid-19 to others. To add, recheck the distance between RELA and Malaysian Civil Defence in terms of circulation, as this may scare migrant workers. Once again, every migrant worker including undocumented workers, wanderers and shelters, will receive free Covid-19 testing and treatment. In addition, ensure that migrant workers adopt food arrangements provided by the government. Covid-19 was effectively prevented and disseminated in terms of operational detention priorities and migrant workers' residences. If affirmative or suspicious pollution should occur, allow migrant workers to enter a separated office that obtains a social severance permit. When continuing to carry out business activities after removing certain MCO restrictions, it should be carefully observing all pollution control conditions and standard operating procedures (SOPs) prescribed by the government in the department that uses migrant workers to ensure their safety. Furthermore, ensure that employers of migrant workers in basic management, such as assembling elastic gloves, recognize and mitigate all dangers of introducing Covid-19, and respect the work privileges of migrant workers. Employers should also provide guidance on word-related safety and well-being measures and clean rehearsals in dialects that migrant workers can understand. Make sure that migrant workers who cannot work during the MCO are paid in instalments and enjoy the benefits, and there is no separation, and follow the directions in the MOHR FAQ. Make sure not to protect migrant workers on unfair grounds. Moreover, if protection is needed, it should ensure that migrant workers including undocumented migrant workers are paid government disability and the benefits of previous work. Every migrant worker including undocumented migrant workers should take legal treatment, pay for unattended medical services and manage language translation in important places. Last but not least, expand social security and upgrade measures to resist the currency impact of Covid-19 to cover migrant workers protection.

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