BACKGROUND

Lao People’s Democratic Republic confirmed its first case on 24 March 2020. Since that announcement, there have been 22 confirmed cases, with the last (19th) reported local case on the 11th of April. Since then, three more imported cases were confirmed in July and August, via charter flights entering Lao People’s Democratic Republic. To date, there have been no confirmed cases among the recent influx of migrant worker returnees. Authorities confirmed that the imported cases were an isolated event. At the point of drafting this report, the international borders remain officially closed.

The Lao Government has called on those working abroad to return home through official international checkpoints to ensure they are properly scanned for COVID-19.1 At the same time, the government committed to provide help to these returning migrants to find new employment.2 The number of workers returning to Lao People’s Democratic Republic from Thailand between 24 March and 30 May was estimated at 79,208.3 It is hoped that returning workers can find jobs with Lao businesses and receive appropriate training before taking up new employment.

This report is the first in a series to highlight the extent of the COVID-19 effects on returning migrants from Thailand in terms of their anticipated socio-economic vulnerabilities and challenges. Up to 80% of respondents were not concerned about their ability to find employment. It appears that the wave of returning migrants could contribute to the local economic landscape as more than 50% of them either have no plans to leave Lao People’s Democratic Republic for work again or are not sure of their plans. More than 90% of them were willing to upskill for better opportunities.

Since April 2020, the Skill Development and Employment Department (SDED), Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare accepted the support and assistance from the IOM to respond to COVID-19 specifically in the areas of 1) Coordination and Partnership, 2) Risk Communication and Community Engagement, and 3) Surveillance.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

As part of the COVID-19 Response collaboration between SDED and IOM, direct assistance and Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials were distributed to migrants at quarantine centres (QC) to support their everyday needs and onward journey. At the same time, the field team also took the opportunity to interview migrants who had returned and were still staying in QC at time of interview. Convenience sampling was applied. A total of 40 returned migrants were interviewed across four (4) provinces: Vientiane Capital, Champasak, Salavan, and Luang Prabang to interview a total of 40 returned migrants, over four (4) days, that is on the 26 June, 8 July, 9 July, and 27 July.

40 TOTAL RESPONDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Respondents by Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Champasak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salavan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luang Prabang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vientiane Capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 respondents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two (2) limitations to be noted while reading this report:

i. Given the time and movement constraints imposed by the government for visits to QCs, the study employed convenience sampling based on accessibility and willingness of migrants to be interviewed. As such, the findings of this study should be taken as anecdotal and not representative of all returning migrants.

ii. The location of the interview (inside QCs) and the social status of the enumerators (government and IOM officials) may have influenced the returning migrants’ responses and may reflect a social desirability bias.

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3 Thailand National Taskforce Committee for Covid-19 Prevention and Control
PROFILE AT A GLANCE

Data was collected using the combined experiences of 9 to 11 migrants per QC, in total interviewing:

- 40 migrants
- 53% male
- 47% female
- Age 21 to 47

About 63% of the migrants are married, and the rest are single, divorced or separated. Among all the migrants, 50% have children.

Most common work found in Thailand was factory work (25%), Agriculture/Forestry (19%) and Construction (19%)

MIGRATION JOURNEY

All interviewed migrants returned to Lao People’s Democratic Republic in the month of July with 83% of them travelling by international border checkpoints and the rest returning by traditional borders.

About 45% of them were regular migrants working in Thailand with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

Most migrants found work in Thailand through Facebook groups, family and friends, with 35% of them reporting to have gone through recruitment agencies.

Top 5 provinces of origin in Thailand that migrants returned from

- PathumThani: 8%
- ChonBuri: 8%
- Bangkok: 20%
- Chanthaburi: 8%
- Songkhla: 8%

The boundaries and names shown, and the designation used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM

Data Source: Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX) and IOM

Around 70% of migrants were either working on a farm or doing unpaid household work in Lao People’s Democratic Republic before leaving for Thailand. The other 30% were self-employed as either a trader, employed in hospitality sector, student or unemployed.
In Thailand, the announcement of wide-ranging business closures by the Governor of Bangkok on 21 March 2020 and subsequent announcement of the State of Emergency by the Prime Minister on 26 March 2020 triggered mass movements of migrants from Bangkok and other provinces, in Thailand to migrant home provinces, as well as across borders to home countries in Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (the) and Myanmar. The inter-provincial travel bans in Thailand slowed down the initial influx of returnees. With more restrictions being eased over the past months, Laotian migrants continue to return to the country mainly through land border-crossings. Despite international border closure, migrant workers are allowed entry into Lao People’s Democratic Republic. Among those who returned...

83% Received salary before return

58% Paid overstay fine (range 200 THB to 2,500 THB/6 USD to 80 USD)

25% Incurred costs while waiting to cross border (range 100 to 5,000 THB/3 USD to 161 USD)
QUARANTINE CONDITIONS

Across Lao People’s Democratic Republic, there are 44 active government quarantine facilities. Most migrants returning from Thailand are staying at the KM 4 centre in Savannakhet and KM 27 centre in Vientiane Capital to undergo 14-day mandatory quarantine, as the centres are located in cities with highest migration flow. There are in total three types of quarantine centres: provincial, district level, and community level. The provincial centres are often equipped with most resources and have better infrastructure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Had enough food and water</th>
<th>Brought food and water to quarantine center</th>
<th>Did not bring food and water to quarantine center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 respondents</td>
<td>23 respondents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not have enough food and water</td>
<td>3 respondents</td>
<td>6 respondents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ROOM ARRANGEMENTS INSIDE QC

- **39%** Stayed in a men’s only room
- **32%** Stayed in a women’s only room
- **29%** Stayed in a mixed gender room

Access to water and sanitation facilities (toilet, bathroom)

- **73%** Did not feel uncomfortable
- **9%** Felt uncomfortable
- **18%** Do not want to answer

Among those who stayed in mixed gender rooms...

- **39%** intend to return to their village by bus after quarantine
- **24%** will have family/friends/cousins to pick them up
- **29%** either do not know their plans or did not want to say
- **8%** intend to use the transportation provided by the government to return home

Respondent’s access to information by types

- **42%** COVID-19
- **8%** HIV
- **5%** Travelling and migration

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*Official communication*
**KNOWLEDGE OF COVID-19 SYMPTOMS**

100% of returning migrants were aware of the compulsory 14-day quarantine before returning to Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

90% of those who returned were aware of the symptoms of COVID-19 (cough, fever, difficulty breathing).

Among the returning migrants, 72% of them knew where to seek help if they felt sick, while 29% were unsure or didn’t want to answer. Among those who knew where to seek help, most of them chose to seek help at a hospital.

**FUTURE PLANS**

- 45% plan to stay in Lao PDR until COVID-19 is over
- 38% do not intend to leave for work again
- 12% either do not know their plans or didn’t want to say
- 5% intend to stay for at least six months

*Expected challenges…*

- **35%** do not expect any challenges
- **28%** expect difficulties in finding income generating work
- **18%** didn’t want to talk about challenges

**Sources of information on COVID-19**

- 66%, Facebook
- 26%, Television/radio/print media
- 13%, Thai Government sources
- 11%, Employer in Thailand
- 5%, Other social media platforms
- 5%, Lao Government sources
- 8%, Family/friends in Lao PDR
- 5%, Family/friends in Thailand

58% of returning migrants are interested to upskill. Most sought after skill sets are...

- Sewing/Tailoring
- Driving
- Construction

Among them, more than 91% were willing to study, take tests and receive certificate of skills.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>ANNEX QUESTIONNAIRE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview coding</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date of interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of interview (Quarantine center)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enumerator Name and Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section A: Demographic Questions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What province are you from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is this your home province?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes, where are your children? (location)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If elsewhere, please specify where (different province or different country)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section B: Migration Journey</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before leaving Lao PDR: what was your employment status?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If employed, what was your main occupation before leaving Lao PDR?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did you return to Lao PDR?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When did you return from overseas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which border checkpoint did you enter to Lao PDR through?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where have you returned from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where in Thailand did you stay?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where in Malaysia did you stay?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were you employed in destination country?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If employed, what was your main occupation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was your form of documentation for entering Thailand?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What document did you have to work in Thailand?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you enter Thailand using a job recruitment agency?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you name the agency?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What channels did you use to find work in Thailand?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you receive your final salary before leaving Thailand?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you have to pay any overstay fines or costs when leaving Thailand?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount paid in Thai Baht</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Section C: Experience in Quarantine

**Did you bring food and water with you to the quarantine center?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**Have you had enough food and water while staying here?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**Have you been staying in a room with women and men?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**Has this made you feel uncomfortable or unsafe?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**Have you been able to access water and sanitation facilities (toilet, bathroom) when you have needed to?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**What was the reason for this?**

- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**Have you received any information while you’ve stayed here?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**What is this information (COVID-19, Job related, social security etc)?**

- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

### Section D: Future Plans

**Upon finishing the quarantine stay, will you return to your village?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**Where will you go instead? Please specify**

- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**Where will you go instead? Why**

- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**How long do plan to stay in Lao PDR?**

- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**What kind of challenges do you expect to face upon return to your community?**

- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**Please specify**

- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**Would you like to receive more vocational training?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**About**

- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**Do you want to undertake the test/exam to obtain the certificate of skill?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

### Section E: Awareness on COVID-19

**Did you know about the compulsory 14-day quarantine before returning to Lao PDR?**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**How do you plan to go back home after the compulsory 14-day quarantine at the quarantine center?**

- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**Are you aware of the symptoms of COVID-19? (fever, cough, difficulties breathing)**

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**Do you know whom to contact when you get sick?**

- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**What main sources of information on COVID-19 have you accessed?**

- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

**Comments**

- [ ] Other: _Please specify:_ 

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