

The Future of Work in the New Normal: The Labour Response

Oct 16, 2020

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Speaker's Note

1. Could Covid-19 cause a higher appreciation and remuneration for workers in certain sectors, like medical and care workers?

- *Keep all health workers safe*
- *Introduce hazard pay*
- *Raise pay to a permanent living wage*
- *Expand paid leave*
- *Give workers the respect they deserve – rightful recognition*

Philippine government Bayanihan to Heal As One Act benefits packages:

Grants public and private healthcare workers who contract severe COVID-19 infection while in the line of duty to a P100,000 compensation, and one million pesos (P1,000,000) to the family of any health worker who may die while fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

P500 daily hazard pay but it does not apply to areas not in ECQ status

Data from Economic Research Institute-powered company, [Salary Expert](#), showed that nurses in different parts of Southeast Asia earn the following figures per month, which was rounded up:

- P63,200: Vietnam
- P79,000: Indonesia
- P83,000: Thailand
- P97,000: Malaysia
- P236,000: Singapore
- P40,381: Philippines

2. Could Covid-19 trigger a change to hire cheap foreign workers? – This must be the path for providing decent work for migrant workers.
 - Within the BWI declaration, there is a demand for an international standard on labour camps and other accommodation for migrant workers that address health and safety, as well as other human and labour rights. In addition to that, it is demanded that governments and employers engage in wage protection for migrant workers during the pandemic and end forced repatriation.

- Although the demand for cheap foreign workers in developed countries will not decrease after the Covid-19 pandemic, there are significant costs that have fallen on the shoulders of destination countries, and rightfully so. Foreign workers will now be seen less as cheap labour, and it is a positive change in the narrative of migrant workers, ensuring they are treated with dignity and decency.
- In Singapore, the spread of Covid-19 rapidly within migrant dormitories was almost an afterthought to the government. This is not only telling towards the position of migrant workers in society, but also that infrastructure to mitigate crises like this occurring are not well formulated. Singapore has now stated that they plan to build fully functioning dormitories equipped with amenities for migrant workers that can house up to 100,000 workers at once.
- In Qatar, changes to labour law now force employers to pay their workers a basic salary of 1000 Qatari Riyals (a little over \$250), with 500 (\$130) riyals provision for accommodation and 300 (\$80) riyals for food.
- On the other hand, there is a possibility that because labour is now more “expensive”, undocumented labour will be taken advantage of.

3. What social security adjustments are needed to deal with the new normal?

- As of January 2020, Malaysia’s Social Security Organization (SOCSO) made itself available to cover 2.2 million migrant workers. The move came as a signal that Malaysia is beginning to adhere to ILO Convention 19 Equality of Treatment (Accident Compensation).
- In terms of dealing with the new normal, SOCSO assured that they will bear the cost of the COVID-19 screenings for migrant workers as most documented workers contribute to the fund. This is an example of how Malaysia is taking steps to ensure migrants are remembered when thinking about national social protection.
- However, this effort can only be seen as a short-term solution because SOCSO excludes undocumented workers, increasing their vulnerability during the pandemic and there is a high possibility that employers will take advantage of undocumented workers due to this.
- Recognizing this, BWI also demands that all peoples within national borders, including undocumented migrants be allowed access to food, healthcare, sanitation, and housing to address human dignity deficits.
- So in terms of social security, as we have already lived through months of this pandemic, at this point moving forward with the new normal is making space for undocumented workers and offering them decent standards of living, and a medium to express their rights, as well.
- It is important to identify, especially now, which new social measures set in place are short term relief and improve them to be long term relief. Medium-to-long-term responses provide a systemic approach that offers more comprehensive protection that is adequate and economically sustainable.

- A suggestion of a long term evolution to Malaysia’s adherence of ILO Convention 19, Equality of Treatment (Accident Compensation) would be to ratify and implement the ILO Conventions 97 and 143.

4. How could worker organisation preserve their bargaining power?

“Rights for all, Everywhere”. For trade unions, the consistent respect of workers’ rights is fundamental. Strong enforcement of international labour standards should be the bedrock of migrants’ protection wherever they are. Right to join trade unions gives migrants a collective voice to fight abuse and to receive the fair value of their work. *Governments and employers have to recognise, respect and operationalise these fundamental rights all the time as they are the key and means in solving the problems of human dignity deficits.*

5. Could the Covid-19 crisis accelerate previous efforts to skill, upskill and cross-skill? – Yes.

Groups of individuals needing training, reskilling and upskilling

As economies recover, there will be large groups of individuals whose employment prospects have been damaged by the pandemic. Skills development will be an important part of the policy offerings needed to get them into employment in decent and stable jobs, and to avoid long term career scarring. Which groups are worst affected and are of highest policy priority will vary between countries. Specific groups to think about include: people in precarious employment whose jobs are likely to be at risk, especially those with weak employment relationships or contractual arrangements; young people entering the labour force who have difficulty finding employment; newly unemployed low skilled workers of all ages in affected industries; newly unemployed workers with medium or high level skills that do not closely match the needs of recovering industries; older workers who are newly unemployed; and informal economy workers facing diminished income generating opportunities. They may also include groups frequently disadvantaged in the labour market such as women, minority communities, returning migrant workers or internal migrants, refugees, people with disabilities and workers who were already long term unemployed or precariously employed before the pandemic. It is important to identify and anticipate the types of real labour market opportunities available to prioritized groups, to identify what the main gaps are between the skills they have and those needed by employers, to identify practical actions that can be taken to reskill and upskill existing workers to meet these needs, and to bridge skills gaps so as to facilitate transition into work for new labour market entrants.

[ILO Recommendation R205](#) – Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience provides guidance to Members on measures to be taken to generate employment and decent work for purposes of prevention, recovery, peace and resilience with respect to crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic which seriously disrupt the functioning of a community. It suggests actions under all four pillars of Decent Work: employment; rights, equality and non-discrimination; social protection; and social dialogue.

6. What kind of new **work culture** is needed?

- OSH consciousness is a must
- BWI demands that global market drivers during the pandemic and in the post COVID-19 future should be challenged to improve health and social outcomes for migrant workers as well as economic and political rights.

- What this means that although the global economy is healing from a downfall, the new work culture born from the pandemic should keep worker welfare and rights at the centre of the conversation. Migrant workers will experience loss of jobs and income, poor working and living conditions, have lack of access to sanitation and their visibility will increase due to their migrant and employment status.
- To mitigate this, governments need to set in place short term responses, catering to immediate needs and placing migrants at an equal level to that of locals.
- Short term responses that can be adopted by destination countries is simple access to healthcare for migrants and this can be done efficiently by engaging in social dialogue with local unions that know the lived realities and struggles of migrants. These support systems would enable migrants to access the necessary social protection schemes that they require. Employers can also work to advocate concerns for their foreign employees, like extensions of visas and work permits. BWI recognizes the importance for demanding amnesty on the part of migrant workers, calling for countries to suspend arrests and deportations of works, especially the undocumented, so that they are not exposed to prolong risk.
- In the long term, the new work culture we need can be achieved with the ratification and implementation of international standards, continuous social dialogue with unions, workers, employers and the government, ensuring that policies of social protection streamline with employment and migration policies so that they are not contradicting, protecting migrants within the informal economy and enhancing regional/global cooperation drawing up bilateral labour agreements fostering healthy migration and labour practices.

7. What role can trade unions play in this transformation process?

No One should be Left Behind. It is sad to see that workers are being disposed like masks. For some, they were relabelled from “partners in wealth creation” to “taxpayers’ burden”. We have even tracked some MDB infrastructure projects that shutdown without job and income protection to the workers. *While governmental clients and contractors are directly responsible, we call on the international financial institutions to establish a “Workers’ Monitor” with BWI and some global unions and provide protection and safety nets in their own projects.*

Labour Inspection Saves. Governments have to expand and strengthen their regulatory system and reinforce their labour inspectorate – both within home countries and at the countries of deployment. *Technical and financial support has to be realised on this priority. Work site inspections are also responsibility of contractors and trade unions, thus, a multi- stakeholder “Alliance for Safety and Health” is an imperative.*

Stop Weaponizing Migrant Labour. The global labour market is facilitating social tensions and is eroding the social gains of trade unions. Free movement has been equated to stealing of jobs which in turn spawns racism and xenophobia. The ripple effect of low-wage business model has reinvented politics and at the same time push millions into continuing poverty. *We have to challenge this way of business and its social outcomes constantly. This should be our common political-social project, pandemic and post-COVID realities further considered.*